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ABSTRACT

Travellers with their distinctive cultures and lifestyles have been part of Scotland for centuries. The two main groups are the traditional Travelling People (Gypsies) and the Showground Community. Mobility and migration patterns have implications for Traveller children's education and for schools. Scottish national surveys show Travellers attending schools in almost every local authority during 1988-93, but not in every year. Analysis of attendance in five schools showed no regular patterns for Gypsy Travellers, while Showground pupils attended school regularly during the winter and usually returned to the same school each year. Increasing age brought significant reductions in Gypsy pupils' attendance, with very few attending after grade 7. Most Showground pupils dropped out by their 16th birthday. Comments by school staff suggest that the dropout rate increased after introduction of Standard Grades and continuous assessment arrangements. School offered Showground pupils no reward for their years of effort, while the Showground community provided positive nonformal learning experiences and preparation for adulthood and employment. Schools were concerned by Traveller pupils' underachievement and attributed it to lack of educational continuity and to social bias. Since funding is based on local "catchment," few schools could guarantee resources for their "absent" pupils. Various international projects show the feasibility and value of distance learning, but financial support, staff training, international collaboration, access to open learning facilities, and personal tutorial support are needed. In Scotland, increased flexibility in the educational system and openness toward nontraditional "sites of learning" are also needed. (Contains 42 references and contact information for resource centers.) (SV)

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SCRE Spotlights
From The Scottish Council for Research in Education
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Travellers with their distinctive cultures and traditional life-styles have been part of the Scottish scene for centuries. The two main groups are the traditional Travelling People, for long a well-known part of the rural and cultural scene, and the Showground Community. Travellers' mobility and patterns of comings and goings have implications for their children's education and for the schools in which they enrol. This paper, based on research between 1992 and 1998, discusses the framework of provision for these 'interrupted learners' and argues both for more flexibility and for more account to be taken of the potential of out-of-school sites of learning in raising achievement.

'You spend all night reorganising your groups and teaching plans so that they won't be isolated [in the class], and then they don't come back! It gets a bit frustrating, but it's just their culture. We're used to it here'. These words, of a teacher in a school with regular comings and goings of Travellers, sum up the reality for schools which try to accommodate their Traveller pupils.

Travellers with their distinctive cultures and life-styles have been part of the Scottish scene for centuries. Despite often being marginalised and victims of open racism, they continue with their preferred and traditional life-styles (Morran *et al* 1999). However their experiences of name-calling and bullying within schools, added to the difficulties their mobility patterns make for accessing educational facilities, lead to high levels of discontinuity in learning. This research, undertaken between 1992 and 1998, investigated the situation of Travellers within the comprehensive school system in Scotland. Their situation is important in its own right. It also offers a paradigm for many other groups of interrupted learners whose educational needs are not yet fully met within our mainstream comprehensive schools.

BACKGROUND

Gypsy/ Travellers and Occupational Travellers (circus, bargees, show and fairground families) are recognised by the European Parliament as being the groups most socially excluded from school education and with the highest levels of illiteracy (Resolutions 89/C 153/01; 89C 153/02 1989). The two main indigenous groups in Scotland are the traditional Travelling People, for long a well-known part of the Scottish rural and cultural scene, and the Showground community who provide supporting entertainment for annual agricultural shows and charter fairs. Gypsy/ Travellers claim membership and ethnicity through birth and descendency, with shared cultural and linguistic features. Show people refute the term 'ethnic', describing themselves as a 'business community', although with strong familial associations and codes of practice governing their way of life.

It is not possible to say how many Traveller children there are of school age. Travellers are not identified as a discrete group in the official National Census so counts are recognised to be only best estimates. The 1992 Census (Gentleman 1993) on Gypsy/ Travellers in Scotland, which focused on mobile Travellers, estimated some 1500 using local authority sites. The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain (Scottish Section) records some 500 members, but as 'one member' may include several generations of an extended family, statistics greatly underestimate actual numbers. Within Scotland, there are 33 local authority sites for Gypsy/ Travellers, but many also use private sites and housing, including home ownership. The Showground community which overwinters in Glasgow is the largest single such group in Europe. Their children all enrol at Glasgow schools. A few families stay in Edinburgh and in towns in the central belt and Aberdeen. Many own their homes as well as caravan accommodation for travelling.

The *Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People (Third Term Report)* (Scottish Office 1982) drew attention to traditional Travellers' unsatisfactory educational situation, and made recommendations to help overcome the difficulties and inequalities they faced. The EIS, with CoSLA and the CCC (now the Scottish CCC), instigated a Region-by-Region analysis to compile statistics to underpin national policy and the development of good practice. This attempt was never fully realised although a report was produced (1984) and passed to the Scottish Office, who then funded Moray House to maintain an interest and promote developments. This led to the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) which continues to be funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department with a remit to run a national centre and maintain a specialist library.

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THE NATIONAL SURVEY

In 1992 there were still no national statistics on Travellers in Scottish schools and the only available literature was scant and based on experiences in England (Department of Education and Science 1967; Reiss 1975; Swann 1985) and the continent (Liegeois 1987; Knaepkens 1987). Did they attend schools? If so, where and for how long? To help answer these questions, a questionnaire was sent to every school in Scotland asking for a return based on Travellers' attendances during the 1991–92 session. The results showed that Traveller pupils were present within every local authority, except the three Islands Councils, with some few attending nurseries and special schools as well as primaries and secondaries. In all, 117 schools reported having Travellers. Actual attendances varied from a single half-day to a full session (see Figure 1 below). A similar pattern was repeated with little change in each successive year (four sessions) up to the disaggregation of the local authorities. But not every one of the schools had Travellers in each consecutive year. For some, there was only a single visit, while for the majority, there was a variable annual cohort. In all, over the four sessions, 133 different schools reported having Travellers on the roll.

ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

In order to try to understand the complex patterns emerging from the national survey, two other ways of collecting information were used concurrently with those schools reporting the highest numbers of Travellers on the roll. School A, a village primary, reported 55 different Gypsy/ Travellers in one session, while four secondaries in Glasgow each reported around 20 Showground pupils. The registers for these schools were analysed over a five-year period to identify any patterns. This painstaking approach revealed a wide range and differences in enrolment and attendance patterns, both for the schools and for the Travellers.

School A received regular enrolments from a local Gypsy/ Traveller site throughout each session. Every class had some children arrive unannounced at varying dates throughout the session. In particular, the Primary 1 class had had 19 Gypsy/ Traveller pupils enrolling and leaving at different times in one session alone. The families attending School A varied from one visit only within the five years studied, to up to four return visits in one session. Such families travelled predominantly between central Scotland and northern England, but also included visits to the south of England, Ireland, France, Germany and latterly Norway. They provided little firm evidence of having attended other schools. The implications for class and group organisation, individual tuition and alterations to the teacher's forward plans, were enormous. 'Flexibility' acquired a new meaning in this situation. Research into the four secondary schools proved more complicated as it became apparent that some pupils who 'disappeared' from one school would appear at another, often after a period of absence such as the travelling season (usually March to October). Unlike Gypsy Travellers, Show pupils attended school regularly during the winter and usually returned to the same school in successive years.

The evidence of pupils dropping out of school was corroborated by the staff interviewed. In School A, attendance patterns showed a significant reduction in Gypsy/ Traveller pupil numbers with increasing age, so that by Primary 7 very few were still attending (see Figure 2) despite the general view that it was the secondary school which caused their exclusion (Kiddle 1999). Why was this happening and was it only in this school?

Figure 2: Pattern of Enrolment at... Primary School

Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1988/89	16	15	6	4	6	8	1	56
1989/90	14	13	5	4	4	5	1	46
1990/91	12	7	13	8	7	10	2	59
1991/92	11	12	3	6	5	3	4	44
1992/93	4	3	1	2	1	2	0	13
Year Totals	57	50	28	24	23	28	8	218

Figure 1: Patterns of Interruptions – 1991/92

Region	Total in schools	0–4 days	5–9 days	10–24 days	25–74 days	75–99 days	100–149 days	150–194 days	195 days	Missing
Borders	3	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	
Central	38	0	8	9	2	2	5	4	7	+1
Dumfries & Galloway	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	+2
Fife	34	0	1	0	4	8	4	2	15	
Grampian	41	0	4	9	11	8	0	5	4	
Highland	24	0	0	0	5	9	3	5	2	
Lothian	73	1	2	17	20	15	2	2	13	+1
SRC – Argyll & Bute	14	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	7	+3
SRC – Ayr	35	0	0	12	1	1	2	7	10	+2
SRC – Dumbarton	14	0	0	0	0	8	1	3	2	
SRC – Glasgow	104	3	1	0	2	10	46	7	35	
SRC – Lanark	60	0	0	2	0	12	5	15	26	
SRC – Renfrew	12	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	4	
Tayside	64	0	2	4	13	18	6	4	12	+5
Unknown	8	0	0	4	0	1	0	2	1	
Totals	529	4	22	59	64	92	77	59	138	+14

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EDUCATION FOR (TRAVELLER) LIFE

Further research with many Gypsy/ Traveller families revealed that this pattern was consistent with their tradition of educating children into their cultural work patterns. By the age of ten children could make a useful contribution to the family's earning capacity and, moreover, they enjoyed working with the adults, participating in experiential learning and gaining approval within their community. The primary schools had little to offer them in this respect.

The drop-out rate in the four secondaries coincided most often with the move from Year 3 to Year 4. As a result, the vast majority of these Showground pupils had effectively left school before their 16th birthday. Schools reported that they had found that this phenomenon had coincided, ironically, with the introduction of Standard Grades, and in particular was attributed to the pupils' difficulties in completing portfolios, etc, in the new system of continuous assessment arrangements. They felt that the resulting lowered self-esteem as they fell further behind their peers, and the apathy engendered by a system which provided no reward for their years of effort, encouraged all but the most academically able to give up. The young people concentrated their efforts instead on being successful within their home-learning domain – the shows. There they acquired a range of skills necessary to 'entice the punters to part with their money'. These included skills in oral communication, various aspects of art, design and technology and the practical application of scientific principles and knowledge in building new rides, as well as entrepreneurial skills and business acumen based on hard work, application, collaboration and mutual support. The close-knit Showground community provided a positive learning experience, a preparation for adulthood and employment.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF TRAVELLING PUPILS

The schools, in their individual comments on the annual questionnaire and in the case studies, demonstrated a keen awareness of the needs of their Traveller pupils and evident frustration at their own inability to meet these. In particular, they highlighted the general lack of awareness and support at local authority level, the lack of flexibility in class organisation and teaching methodology and the increasing reduction in the Traveller pupils' self-esteem with age as they saw the increasing gap between their own scholastic achievements and that of their peers. The evidence from the questionnaires to local authorities supported the schools' view that there was little awareness of the reality schools faced in accommodating the fluctuating numbers and visits of Travellers, often with little or no previous schooling. One urban secondary school with a regular annual cohort of Show Travellers, felt that these pupils experienced discrimination in the level of support available to them. The authority had allocated eleven English as a Second Language teachers for minority ethnic pupils but only one support teacher for all the Show pupils and the 26 schools they attended.

All schools interviewed reported a concern at the lack of progress of Gypsy/ Traveller pupils and attributed their underachievement not to lack of ability but to lack of curriculum continuity and coherence in their education. Some commented on the lack of relevance in the school curriculum to Gypsy/ Travellers' lives. Social aspects were also acknowledged as a factor in pupils' low achievements but were not reported as the crux, although later studies suggest these are important factors in dropping out of schools. A later piece of research on Travellers who had been excluded or had dropped out of school, did find evidence that racist behaviour from peers and lack of support from staff who showed little understanding of the need for strong anti-bullying approaches to be key factors (Lloyd *and* Norris 1998; Lloyd, Stead *and* Jordan 1999; Lloyd, Stead, Jordan *and* Norris 1999). These findings supported the views expressed in the OFSTED report (1999) on Travellers' experiences in four English schools.

Schools with Show Travellers, by contrast, reported that most achieved results comparable with those of their peers, at least up to the end of S2. However, there was a higher than average incidence of dyslexic-type difficulties reported in some families. These, compounded with receiving significantly less teaching than their non-travelling peers, did lead to underachievement in the reading and writing elements of language. Maths, business studies and art were reported as their 'favourite' and 'best' subjects.

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AT A DISTANCE

What can be done then to overcome the barriers to learning for Traveller pupils and to raise their levels of achievement?

Since the May 1989 Resolutions on education for the children of Gypsy/ Travellers and Occupational Travellers, the European Commission has advocated the development of distance learning to support their mobility. In the UK, however, distance learning is traditionally a sophisticated means of supporting independent learning, based on high levels of literacy, higher-order study skills, motivation and adequate space and facilities for study. None of these are guaranteed in mobile Traveller communities. Family literacy levels are low, with few adults having achieved a full education, and while Travellers say they value literacy and academic achievement, they demonstrate a value system based on practical skills and a motivational drive to be economically self-sufficient within the self-employed market.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Schools often provided Traveller families with learning packs for children to take away with them. Yet schools are funded for their 'local' catchment and school boards have the power to influence headteachers' spending plans. School boards, too, have been reported by schools as

viewing negatively the high levels of absenteeism in their Traveller pupils (Jordan *and* Holmes 1997; Jordan (forthcoming 2000)). In School A, Gypsy/ Traveller pupils had an average attendance rate of only 67% while enrolled at the school. In comparison, Show Traveller pupils had a higher than average attendance rate during the winter period. Schools may use authorised absence 'while the [Traveller] family is legitimately travelling for work purposes' (SOEID, 1996) but headteachers reported that this is thought of little comfort by school boards when attendance tables are published. Few schools are able, then, to guarantee resources for their 'absent' Traveller pupils.

GOOD PRACTICE

SOCRATES Comenius Action 2 funds have supported a variety of international projects which have enabled schools and local and national authorities to develop sound practice in Travellers' education. TOPILOT, an innovative European project to provide IT-supported distance learning for Show and Bargee Traveller pupils, involved a Scottish secondary school and SCET as partners (Jordan 1998; STEP/Moray House video 1998). This project focused on the use of CDi linked to computers and satellite communication to support pupils' learning as they travelled round Scotland. The software learning packages, developed in collaboration with other countries, proved to be useful as a means of keeping pupils engaged and 'on-task', but were not sufficiently stretching for pupils as a long-term curriculum replacement. Increased rates of work completed and the growth in pupils' and families' interest and enthusiasm, leading to raised expectations, were welcome outcomes and helped stimulate further work, such as the FLEX and TRAPEZE projects.

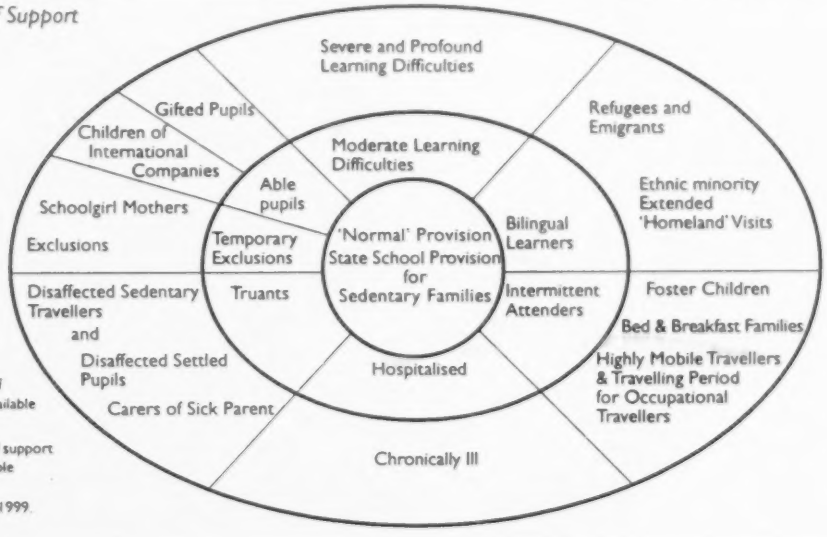
These projects demonstrate the feasibility and value of distance learning but schools, as yet, do not have either the necessary skills in developing distance learning materials nor the finance to support this model as a methodology for inclusion. Staff training, collaboration across councils, and ready access to open learning facilities, including personal tutorial support, are necessary in order to provide successful learning for Travellers (Danaher 1998). The introduction of the National Grid for Learning, Super Highways and the push for increased use of technology to encourage independence in pupils' learning are helping schools and local authorities to take up this challenge. In Scotland, many rural and island schools, as well as special schools, regularly extend the concept of the classroom through the use of video-conferencing, as well as the more usual email and internet facilities. Lap-tops, too, are being used with some effect to motivate pupils who are on long-term exclusions and as a means of communicating for a few of those with chronic illnesses and in hospital schools.

Could there be a role for the new community schools, with their more flexible staffing and organisational approaches, as learning centres for all, or should it be for all comprehensive schools?

THE INTERRUPTED LEARNER

Traveller pupils do underachieve compared with their peers. Significant and repeated interruptions for many other groups of learners have been identified as similar barriers to achievement and it is possible to identify such groups who are currently disadvantaged within our so-called comprehensive school system (see Figure 3 below). Such exclusion is not simply based on ethnic antipathy (as is most often claimed by those writing about Gypsy/ Travellers) but on much more complex problems within an insufficiently flexible education system. It would seem that some categories of interrupted learners are viewed as 'deserving' (for example, the chronically sick) since the system has at least acknowledged their particular needs and has accorded them some support for learning out of school (Scottish Executive 1999). However, there is still no

Figure 3: Circle of Support



Outside circle= Range of support not normally available (no flexibility)

Middle circle – Range of support (flexibility) usually available

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statutory right for such pupils nor guaranteed support for families who struggle to maintain their child's educational progress while recuperating (Closs *and* Norris 1997).

Those pupils who seem to be viewed less sympathetically, truants, school refusers and Travellers, are rarely offered any systematic support out of school, while others, such as the young carers who regularly truant and drop out of school to support a family member, or fostered children and homeless families who are moved around, become no school's responsibility and often are not even acknowledged by any local authority (Power, Whitty *and* Youdell 1999). While at present there are few statistics in Scotland on these groups, the total numbers involved are thought to be significant and every school can expect to be affected by such absentees. The DfEE has shown sufficient concern to commission research into categorising and recording incidences of pupil mobility with results which support my findings (Dobson and Henthorne 1999). The report recommends that all local education authorities should collect regular statistics on mobility in order to help frame policy and practice in England. The next phase will include research into resource implications and the impact of mobility on the schools, and identifying practice which minimises the effect of disruption.

TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

We all take pride in the high number of pupils in Scotland going on to further study, but acknowledge the wide gap between them, and many others who still leave school with no formal achievements. There is an evident desire within the new Scottish Parliament and its Executive to develop a more inclusive society with schools expected to play a key role in achieving this aim. How will Scotland's educators rise to this challenge?

This research demonstrated the commitment and care which individual schools and some local authorities provided for Traveller pupils. At present each authority manages its own response to increase inclusion for underachieving and 'at risk' groups, through Excellence funds, New Opportunities and supported study initiatives. However these approaches do not support continuity and coherence for those who have to relate to a variety of schools and learning centres across local boundaries. Nor does it support mobile families who lack a positive educational experience and have little expectation of success in society. A more integrated but flexible approach is required if the needs of Travellers and other interrupted learners' are to be fully met. Some of the approaches being tried and the ideas about changing and developing the concept of school into a broader framework of 'sites of learning' offer stimulating prospects for achieving a genuinely comprehensive education system (Wragg 1999; Bentley 1999).

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About STEP:

The Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP), funded by the Scottish Executive, is based in the Department of Equity Studies and Special Education in the University of Edinburgh. It has a remit to promote awareness of the unique situation of Travellers in Scotland and a respect for their right to preserve their own distinctive lifestyles within our pluralist society; to assist in developing equity for Travellers and other interrupted learners in accessing education and other public services; and to liaise with similar organisations in the UK, the EU and beyond.

As part of the remit STEP produces papers, books and audio-visual materials. Trentham books are able to publish the latest, *Travellers and Schools: Education is for Life* in the autumn of 2000, based on research into policy and provision in the UK.

STEP maintains a national resource centre of historic, social and educational documents including some rare books and audio visual materials for academic reference, research and lending.

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